



USAID | LEBANON

SUCCESS STORY

Youth Advocacy on Environment Demonstrates Shared Vision



Petros Karadjias, AP

Lebanese volunteers from different regions and backgrounds work together to clean up an oil spill on one of Beirut's public beaches.

This activity brings together youth from different backgrounds, teaches them valuable leadership and advocacy skills, and bridges the confessional divide by uniting different groups around a common cause.

March 2008 – In Lebanon, ongoing political deadlock and sectarian infighting have stalled the passage of all but the most vital legislation, resulting in the neglect of public policy issues that have widespread support. To address this gridlock, the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) is helping Lebanese organizations generate consensus and articulate a shared vision on public policy issues that cut across sectarian lines. One such cooperative initiative is a youth-led campaign to reduce air pollution.

Recent forest fires and a major oil spill caused by the bombing of a power plant in July 2006 have renewed public interest in environmental issues. With OTI support and in partnership with the Association for Forest Development and Conservation (AFDC), a Lebanese nongovernmental organization, a group of approximately 30 youth with differing political backgrounds from Lebanon's six regions have joined forces to publicize air pollution studies and encourage government officials to adopt stricter measures to control air pollution. The project is demonstrating that the Lebanese people can work together to address critical issues affecting the country.

The group's work was launched in early March at the American University of Beirut as the first stage in the implementation of the Youth Declaration on Environmental Policy, which was drafted last year. Over the next four months, AFDC will help the group produce and disseminate an air pollution map of the country and study the health impact of pollution in Lebanon. The youth will also receive advocacy skills training.

The Youth Declaration on Environmental Policy represents one of the most recent and visible civil society efforts to unite citizens on a significant cross-cutting issue affecting Lebanon. The effort has helped create a precedent for using dialogue to solve differences of opinion and has equipped youth leaders with important skills. OTI's support leverages this success and is allowing the group to move the process forward: from the effort that produced a well-crafted document to activities that will galvanize young volunteers on key environmental policy issues and put the declaration into practice. As project coordinator Michael Balz commented, the purpose of the implementation is not only to publish findings but also to establish "advocacy and awareness activities to get policies changed...there is a political end."